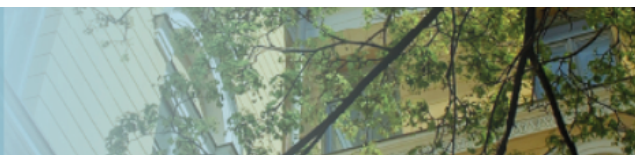


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## **From Ariadne to Medea: The Anthropology of the Unheimlich**

### **(Unfamiliar)**

#### **1. Introduction**

*“With a trembling Mouth she pronounces Serious Talks...*

*Transcending with the Voice Millions of Years to Reach God”*

*Heraklitos*

“Greek Logos is literary lethal”, wrote Holderlin<sup>1</sup>, referring to the Tragedy and the Word in it, that becomes act, referring to Logos that does not only is the creator the world, but also its killer. Holderlin goes even further to distinguish universal feeling hurt by words, from curses and prophecies in Greek tragedy which may cause death, and tear-apart human flesh. Logos, thus, becomes God and its Creator, the human, the perpetual Prometheus archetypal hero who, naked upon the rock will try to sculpture with his nails the ethereal, eternal Light, using his or her pen like a sword against our common fate of surrender.

#### **2. Ariadne**

Bruno Snell<sup>2</sup> wrote once that language is the minimum between the unspoken of the absolute and the cry of the animal; between madness that can not express herself and wisdom that remains silent. Somewhere in between, in a trial course full of personal and collective battles and questions, between Logos and Language, between Prometheus’s rock and the writer’s or the artist’s pen, writing is born; ready to surrender in the most notorious mistakes in order to produce the most productive births, births like those of the two korae Ariadne, and Medea.

If the study of representations became an important field of social and anthropological research<sup>3</sup>, it is because they are considered able to offer to the comprehension of the socio-cultural structures and the relations of power they encompass. But it is also because they consist subconscious codes that transcend time that includes them and surpass society that creates them. Codified messages that reach us, embodying a variety of elements from human history and the historical era that produced them<sup>4</sup>.

Expressions of our collective representations are the archetypes, the prime symbols which the post-Freudian Jung thought of as carriers of the unconscious psychic life of humanity.<sup>5</sup> Archetypal mythological symbols such as Ariadne and Medea, may consist a codified historiography that subscribes the history and fate of mankind.

Even their chosen names, apart from a Logos-God reveal a Logos-Initiator: Ariadne, is derived from the Minoan word “adnos”(pure) and the Attic word “andano”(to take pleasure), according to linguists such as Preler<sup>6</sup> unifies purity(adnos) with pleasure, with libido(andano). This way as a word reverses the religious violence, hidden under the notion of the “sin” (that was going to prevail a few centuries later), but also it unifies the two homelands of Minotaur’s lovers: Minoan-land and Attica-land. A controversial twin by being both ways pure and aphrodisiac at the same time, according to the controversial but well structured and deeply-rooted in the Aegean myths, it is a symbol and a word-act that reveals tragedy in a unique way.

“Tragic” in the Christian sense according to Holderlin<sup>1</sup>, she is “turned inside herself” and the one half of her(the pure) kills the other (the aphrodisiac). Or, rather, this is what both parts would like us to believe...

Because in an occultist, alternative definition of “Tragedy”, derived from the Presocratics, “tragedy exists wherever the victim permits himself or herself to fool him or hers as much as the victimizer”<sup>7</sup> . Thus, the tragic person is never innocent, or pure. On the contrary, it is the person that although he or she is the carrier of “knowledge” he/she doesn’t change at all. Tragedy, according to the Greeks, was not based on naivety but on responsibility. Thus the only sense of innocence a tragic person may claim, or even demand to a greater extent, heading towards a fate that he/she has already chosen, is his or her dignity, that is, to accept darkness, without bending the head in front of any kind of divine authority; in other words, to accept darkness without denying reason, the light. Besides, “it is not worth going into desert if you are not to get lost”<sup>8</sup> .

It is within this realm of mentality that tragedy finds its sociopolitical justice. By poeticizing herself she tries to overcome the Father-God solving the “enigma” of knowledge-tree (and thus of creation) that Father-God, embodiment of Power itself, wanted for his exclusive occupation, offering as an exchange the calm and the commodities of a (totalitarian by its own meaning) Paradise. It is here where human adventure begins, an adventure often clumsy, contradictory, sometimes vulgar, yet exciting and more decent than remaining into the “peaceful-garden” of Eden, without real choice, without real questions; An adventure hidden but not forgotten, disguised behind various names (Paradise, Jerusalem, Ithaca, Socialism, Happiness, Love, Success, Unfamiliar), and the efforts to construct or find them that torture man-kind since the era of Odysseus, or Moses ...<sup>9</sup> .

In the myth of Ariadne the symbol of the “unfamiliar” is the “Cave”, the Minotaur’s Cave, the Womb. At the same time (a hint concerning ancient dualism of the “initiators”) that womb is the “diving” and the affirmation to Life, in other words the “diving” into

“Knowledge”, into “Initiation”, beyond the limits of the “accepted”. In that Cave one possesses nothing, not even his/her body in reality, as it is moving inside darkness and its multiple possibilities and threats, because he/she can be possessed by everything. The Minotaur, symbol of sexuality and emblem of the Minoan maternity, yet cymbal of Dionysus, is the archetype of a love-centric, maternity-centric myth<sup>4</sup>. Anthropologists, and other scholars, like Bremer, R. J. Smith, M. Davis, R. Graves etc<sup>10</sup>, have pointed from different perspectives each one, that the most substantial ritual of the Female Mysteries, was the entrance of the Head-Priest into the “abate” of fertility (and knowledge”). Abate, the forbidden place, could only be reached by the initiated ones, and female priests were of this kind. If Minotaur was the symbolic key-holder of this, and if female Ariadne was the one who gives her lover the “mite” we are still searching for, we may understand why it has been pointed that the myth’s meaning is the symbolic surrender of the Matriarchal Priesthoods into Patriarchy. “Mite” was the long spinner Ariadne gave her beloved one to find his way out from the cave. Yet, the myth’s meaning may also be that in Matriarchy the leader had the role of the guide and the inspirer, and not of the ruler. We should clarify here that we accept the existence of Matriarchy as a phenomenon of the Minoan civilization, because it remains under question if it was universal.

And yet, if Dionysus was born “tavrokeratos” (a Greek word meaning the person bearing horns of a taurus on his head as a symbol of sexual dominance) then Ariadne’s sister, Faedra, may not contribute accidentally to Hippolytus death, the handsome young man that was punished not because he committed a “sin”, but because he denied it, “refusing her Love”. But Ariadne is not Faedra. She falls in love with Theseus, the son of Attica, the Realm of Logos, and hands him the thread, the famous mite, to unlock the secrets of the “Cave”, to bring them into light. In this way she secretly becomes a female Prometheus, persecuted

throughout the centuries, for seeking the tree of knowledge, the source of abate willing, in fact, to share it with others.

Not accidentally, once more, names, have many things to reveal<sup>11</sup>. Medea's motherland is "Knossos", having "Knas" as its founder, the "knowledge-carrier", derived from the verb "knosso", that means I concentrate on myself, *I learn...I know...* And, choosing the Cave, she is identified with the journey outside the "palace", knowing that there are places beyond the golden pots...

In a dictionary of Hindo-European languages, edited by Harvard University Press, we find an interesting information. It is cited there that Semitic Mary, is connected with Mare and that Mare is connected with "Marmairo", Ariadne's nickname, a word that describes poetically the shining of the broad blue womb,(the sea) from the land. The land we stand upon to look ahead. An attitude that gave birth to human mentality behind the term "Ano throskin".(I stand and look into the sky, according to one version).

### **3. Medea**

One of the symbols that are formed from the combination of socio-political circumstances and sentimental investments is the symbol of the "Other". Constructed in a constant and multileveled dialogue with our personal or collective "self-image", charged with social and metaphysical notions that shaped the manifestations of modern-Self<sup>12</sup>, the "Other" hides behind several archetypes or names. Black, Leftist, Liberal, Woman, Arab, Jew, Gay, Lesbian etc.

Medea, the most powerful symbol of human darkness in Greek tragedy, is an archetype of “Otherness” that introduces the anthropology of the “Other” in literature. If Ariadne means “to learn”, the etymological decoding of “Medea” derives from the verb “medomai”: “to think”<sup>i</sup>. Indeed, Medea often is considered the “Thinking Woman”,<sup>13</sup> : the one who handles the material of knowledge, in other words the material of Ariadne. Otherness, in her case, has two main dimensions: a) Herself is a primitive, “Barbarian sorceress” who betrays her family and her people to help her beloved “Jason”, taking a path with noreturn, and the benefited Jason betrays the “Foreigner” to favor the daughter of King Kreon of Korinth, a “true Greek”.

Medea, well instructed by Ekate, draws her wisdom from the “underground world”, gate and part of which is the Cave, and refuses to bend her head under the calculative, authoritarian plans of Jason. (Like Lilith, the first, created also by dust, woman of Adam in the mystic biblical literature, who revolted and escaped into the *desert*<sup>4</sup> and was demonished in the gender-related<sup>13</sup> post-biblical literature...) Medea’s intense inner conflicts bring forth the political and social conflicts of Euripides’ era that undoubtedly are mirrored in Medea’s conversations.<sup>14</sup>

If Snell<sup>2</sup> was right about language and if what we have in this case is ultimate symbols of Literature and Myth, then Ariadne is the Wisdom that surrenders the mite and Silence, while Medea uses this Wisdom in an extremely ambiguous way and Screams.

And yet Medea is an archetype created in the world of “logic” and “cynicism”, the world of patriarchy, that through her myth renegotiates the dialogue with the former matriarchal Priesthoods<sup>4</sup> . Through this procedure she unifies the two worlds. Medea does not die like Ariadne. She kills. And she kills her own bearings, her children, but also the children of the

person who displaced her, conquering like a New, authoritarian, Ruler the Priesthoods: her beloved Jason.

Thus, Euripides, ahead of the average thinking of his era and having the gift of any charismatic poet to be “homo universalis” (a homo that transcends his/her gender, religion, land etc and speaks on behalf of the common good) negotiates with “Otherness” in a deeper level. Pointing, through Medea’s “magic-practicing”, a significant female wisdom, but also projecting as heroic a model completely “in contrast to the givens of the female presence in classical Greece, where woman had to remain isolated inside the house, without any specific presence or rhetoric chances”<sup>14</sup>. Without the presence of Logos. This character, that puts on fire the (Athenian) family, aiming to function as “the lowest institution in the hierarchy of discipline”<sup>15</sup> “manipulates Kreon and gains the time she needs. The loss of Jason is just a matter of passion. But the thing that possibly outrages Medea more is the humiliation, the breaking of the oath –for the maintenance of which she will try in a violent and despicable way for Christian Ethics”<sup>4,14</sup>. Being a Hecates-priest her “oath represents a significant bond between humans. And between humans and “demons”<sup>14</sup>. And that’s why revengeful-katharsis seemed sacred when sacrilege has been committed. Because it helped into a new equilibrium and a new beginning.

Yet Medea, “Lernea Hedra” of reading, as a text is so complicated that could inspire Barthes’s<sup>16</sup> expression “the writer is dead”, since, in a constant dialogue with the readers and our sociopolitical framework, gives birth to more contextual and intertextual readings. It is Barthes in “Camera Lucida” that quotes Nietzsche saying that “A Labyrinth Man never seeks the Truth, but only his Ariadne”... At times it was considered that through this myth the

naturalization of home and child-rearing for women is naturalized: Losing her maternity due to her ambition, she becomes the archetype of the disastrous person who urges for power and revenge. “Thus, the only and natural model for a woman is to let her husband live and rule. And yet, Medea’s revenge was not more dreadful than the many massacres executed by men or fathers”<sup>17</sup>

Euripides, nevertheless, using his writing against naturalization<sup>18</sup>, broadens the limits of the existence beyond the over-simplicities of his era. And like another Sophist he speaks like “a man without home-country”, according to A. Lesky’s expression<sup>19</sup> (“homo universalis”) justifying through the “chorus” the rage of barbarous Medea, and transcending Herodotus’ commands for “common blood”... He chooses to “shock” Medea’s spectators, in order to become the consciousness of his society, and possibly of any society, as he continues to whisper big human truths in some of our sleepless nights.

Medea, destroying the simplistic-model of the humble and patient “mummy”, (of any given truth?) is possibly the only tragedy which does not target to katharsis, to rest, but to the restlessness, reminding Kane’s<sup>20</sup> quote “I don’t want to write theater for a “cultivated” audience that just want to spend a nice Saturday night” (meaning to ease consciences that we are “cultivated” in order to hide the ritualization of a constant –social and interpersonal - brutality).

Medea becomes, from this point of view, the archetype of the violated by the materialistic and authoritarian drives female nature and sexuality, “the fullness of a woman’s extraordinary and dangerous being”, that “might at any moment return through violence”<sup>21</sup>.



Her body, thus, like Ariadne's in a different way, "is all bodies, her mouth is all mouths"<sup>22</sup> .  
"Only her face is not negotiable..."

But the human "face" has the capacity to return through centuries, horribly stranger, and horribly common, to remind us all these that we would like to forget. And all these we wouldn't like to remember. We still make a conversation with Ariadne, betray Medea, meet Kreon in a demonstration or in an office, we still watch Jason enter the Parliament through Mass Media. We may still be named after "Lavdakides", we may still be citizens of the ancient "Thebes". Yet, most of all, so often, we are all the above, constructing justifications for ourselves, without having the strength or the dignity to say, like Oedipus, "I must hear the Truth" ("Akousteon").

Truths return as "whispers" through the texts of important writers, or myths. And indeed this is their power, indeed. "Why does exist this surviving power of the Greek myths in our civilization? Why do they still haunt us?" Steiger<sup>1</sup> asked. It may be because in their case we have a pure justification of the Biblical notion that "Logos becomes First", and the Power of "Greek Logos" is that it overcomes "theory", and becomes act.

One summer, as a teenager, in the busy island of Naxos, the land of the mythological birth-giving and burial of Ariadne, I looked with dazzled eyes at a script in the archeological museum.- "Give me, made from land, a *glass to drink, from that land that gave birth to me, the land I'm going to sink*". (to be buried). I remember I instantly understood the sacrilegious relation that deeply unifies the substantial sanctity with writing. "Alcohol", no matter its form (drink, idea, land, wound or love) with literature. People from the island of Naxos, according to the myth, believed that Ariadne had died there, and that she had produced with Dionysus

two children: Stafylos(Grape) and Oinopeas(Wine-maker). Both names related with the wine. Or, elsewhere, with Forgetting whatever has hurt us. And whatever will haunt us.

And yet, in this endless dialogue with the unfamiliar, (the Freudian and Lacanian Unheimlich) Theseus didn't enter in reality the cave. He had been carrying it inside himself from the beginning. Similarly to the cave that Medea brought into the light, breaking the mirrors of civilization. Unifying, with a magnificent and disturbing way, the two poles of Freudism: Sexuality with drive for life, and drive for death<sup>23</sup>. "Self is someone Else", wrote Rimbaud, speaking for love and power, for hope and despair, for the identical and the stranger, for sexuality and the beast we hide (like Minotaurs) inside us. For death and creation. If we realize that, and if we transcend our internalized controls<sup>24</sup> (the repression internalized as a sociopolitically determined "divine-order" and manifested like a phobic discipline) then we can possibly understand why the "heresies of the night are being burnt by the dreams"<sup>25</sup>. And in the same fire we may meet Ariadne and Medea<sup>26</sup>: The Best in Ourselves and the (close or distant) "Other".

Victor Frankl,<sup>26</sup> giving the example of God who appeared as a cloud to the Israelites to guide them through the desert toward the promised land, instead of present Himself among them or above them, he argues that the message of the myth is that "meaning" should proceed(go "infront") the existence. And it might be like that in order to escape from collective and personal "egos" and the arrogance of world-views produced throughout the centuries.

But this "infront", for Greek view of the world which identified action with philosophy<sup>ii</sup> (and viseversa) and not with metaphysics, should include the agony of "akousteon", of the conversation with the unfamiliar within us, the –internal and external- "otherness",

broadening the limits of the “self”. Yet, “the road to the next person is far away”, far like the Voice that, since Heraclitus and Euripides, “transcends millions of years to meet God”.

Women of the Myth, like Medea and Ariadne, will not abandon us in that ultimate Journey. Humans are by nature myth-questers and myth creators. But when the myth is dressed with the absolute, then logos from an act becomes a doctrine, and human from “the” cause becomes “the” mean. Maybe that’s why in the “function of Logos, the dreamer will have the burden of the sorrow, of the thought, of the speaking, of the being”<sup>25</sup> .

Being and Not Being, “Self” and “Other”, changing places and names, will remain in that constant and complicated dialogue between the “threatening aboriginal” of Medea and the “mite”, the Perpetual Messiah, of Ariadne. A dialogue incapable of being completed until humanity realizes the need to seek myth with less narcissism. In other words with less arrogance and with more acceptance. Maybe then “we can look together in the same spot of **vanity**, were may occur, I guess, the only **meaningful** meetings”<sup>27</sup> ...

Eleni Karasavvidou

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

7 Queen Olga avenue,

Thessaloniki, 54640

Greece

Email: helenkapa@gmail.com

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<sup>1</sup> George Steiner, *The Antigones*, (Athens: Kalentis, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: the Greek Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 1953).

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- <sup>3</sup> Michael Bredsley, *The History of Esthetic Ideas* (Athens: Nefeli, 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> Giorgios Tsagrinos, "The Return of Ariadne", in *Women and Holy* ed. Avlidou, Ifigeneia (Athens: Arhetypo, 2001), 45-62.
- <sup>5</sup> Carl Jung and Kerenyi Carl, *Essays on a Science of Mythology* (New York: Hull's, 1989).
- <sup>6</sup> Tsagrinos, "The Return of Ariadne", in *Women and Holy*, 56.
- <sup>7</sup> Eleni Karasavvidou, *The Ancient Disease* (Athens: Omprella, 2000), 17.
- <sup>8</sup> Stelios Roidis, *The Silence of the Summer* (Corfu: Epsilon, 2007).
- <sup>9</sup> Karasavvidou, *The Ancient Disease*, 42.
- <sup>10</sup> Christina Maravelia, "The Mite of Ariadne" in *Women and Holy*, 208- 217.
- <sup>11</sup> Ernest Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, (Athens: Erasmos, 1989).
- <sup>12</sup> Roger Cox, *Shaping Childhood, Themes of uncertainty in the history of adult-child relations*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 127.
- <sup>13</sup> Elisabeth Davis Good, *The First Gender*, (Athens: New Frontier, 1982).
- <sup>14</sup> [www.wikipedia.gr/Medea](http://www.wikipedia.gr/Medea)
- <sup>15</sup> Cristopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre- Revolutionary England*, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1964), 443.
- <sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (London, HarperCollins, 1993). Also Barthes in "Camera Lucida" quotes Nietzsche saying that "A Labyrinth Man never seeks the Truth, but only his Ariadne"...
- <sup>17</sup> Ifigenia Avlidou, "The Women of the Myth" in *Women and Holy*, 174-189.
- <sup>18</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, (London: Longman, 1989).
- <sup>19</sup> Alan Lesky, *The Tragic Poetry of Ancient Greeks*, (Athens: MIET, 2003).
- <sup>20</sup> Sarah Kane, interview (in memoriam in newspaper Eleytherotypia, Athens 1/9/2002) 34.
- <sup>21</sup> Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Cambridge, (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 8.
- <sup>22</sup> Kostas Papagiorgis, *Syndrome of Agoraphobia*, (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1998).
- <sup>23</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (N. York: Harper Collins, 1975).
- <sup>24</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984).
- <sup>25</sup> Giorgos Himonas, *The dreams of sleeplessness* (Athens: Plethron, 1991).
- <sup>26</sup> Merlin Stone, *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
- <sup>26</sup> Victor Frankl, *Psychotherapy and Existence* (Athens: Tamasos, 1987).

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<sup>27</sup> Giannis Ritsos, *Eleni*, (Athens: Kaktos, 1988).

<sup>i</sup> In English exists the verb “mete” (to think) that derives from Homeric dialect.

<sup>ii</sup> The Friendship Toward wisdom (Philo-Sophia) and Friendship was not just feelings but acts.